

I. Introduction

California's economy is emerging from the worst recession since the Great Depression. As Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. pointed out in his 2013 State of the State Address, "California lost 1.3 million jobs in the Great Recession, but we are coming back at a faster pace than the national average." The impacts of the Great Recession, however, have been serious both for workers and employers. There are still many more job-seekers than jobs. Perhaps even more importantly, today's workers face a very different labor market from their parents – one that is more volatile and rapidly changing. Many of our institutions, both public and private – including education, training, unemployment, and re-employment systems – have failed to keep pace. They were designed for a time when technological change was slower, the labor force was less globalized, and occupations and careers were more stable.

For California to maintain its status as a place of innovation and shared prosperity, those institutions must support a "retraining economy." Workers must be learners who can traverse a labor market landscape that is less about "jobs" and more about a set of marketable skills broadly relevant to industry sectors within regional economies. Through the implementation of California's Strategic Workforce Development Plan, Governor Brown and the State Board are committed to making the retraining economy a reality by:

- Aligning the state's workforce institutions and programs around the needs of regional growth sectors; and thereby
- Increasing the number of Californians, including those from underrepresented demographic groups, who are able to access and succeed in postsecondary education and training programs.

Regions will carry out and lead most of this work, but the state also has key roles to play. These include working with the regions to forge a shared vision, as well as coordinating the activities of state institutions to support that vision and removing barriers to implementation.

The development of California's Strategic Workforce Development Plan was the first step. The State Board convened the directors of the state's key workforce departments and agencies (State Working Group) to develop a blueprint for action, which committed them to common strategies, goals, and concrete action steps (Chapters I, III, IV). The draft blueprint was then taken to regional focus groups to validate, revise, and improve it. Essential elements of the plan include:

- Regional workforce and economic development networks that can engage employers, labor, education and workforce training providers, economic developers, and other community partners to address a region’s education and training priorities; and
- Industry sector partnerships with deep employer engagement that develop career pathway programs that support job-seekers and workers to acquire and enhance industry-relevant skills over the course of their lifetimes.

Within this framework, Local Boards are expected to play multiple roles:

- Convening, supporting, and participating in regional efforts;
- Working with partners to build new kinds of integrated programs, including career pathway programs;
- Engaging employers; and
- Providing feedback to state institutions, the Legislature, and the Governor about what works and what doesn’t.

Community colleges, adult education programs, apprenticeship programs, and economic development programs are also expected to play some of these as well as other roles that contribute to attaining our shared goals. Employers and employer organizations, labor unions, and community-based organizations will have to be deeply engaged for the strategies to be successful.

California’s Strategic Workforce Development Plan has a five-year time horizon. As such, we see it as a living document that – based on experience and changing conditions – will be revised over time. However, the core commitments of the Plan will not change. These commitments are to a skilled workforce, a vibrant economy, and shared prosperity for all Californians.